

# THE WESTGATE SCHOOL

Hampshire's First 4-16 'All Through' School

*"The Westgate School is a community of learners where partnerships inspire success for all:  
learning together – achieving excellence"*

Headteacher: Mrs F A Dean, MA (Ed)

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Dear Parents/ carers,

Hampshire CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) have kindly put together a guide for parents, carers and professionals with some sound advice about the next stage. I have summarised this for you. To read the full guide and to see links to the support, click on this link: <https://www.westgate.hants.sch.uk/pupil-support> - filed under the COVID 19 section. There are also links to support and advice in the pupil support section of the school website, [click here](#). This has been an exceptionally challenging time for everyone, young and old alike. Whether you have been directly or indirectly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic and the social distancing/ social isolation lockdown measures, it has dominated our lives for many months. Whilst many people are looking forward to 'normal life' resuming, this is also an uncertain period of transition which many are finding anxiety-provoking. We have put together this brief guide with some tips on 'How to Cope After Covid'.

This guide includes;

- 1) Looking after yourself
- 2) Looking after primary aged children
- 3) Looking after secondary school aged young people
- 4) Looking after young people with SEND and Autistic Spectrum Condition

## **1) Looking after yourself**

You are human first and foremost; you have thoughts and feelings and you will have been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and social distancing/ isolation measures just like everyone else. Whether you have been affected directly or indirectly, it is important to acknowledge the impact it has had on you and how you are feeling.

### **Things that you can do to help:**

- Take time to find your new routine, think about your 'to-dos' and priorities and how you want to address these.
- Making a plan and being organised can help when you feel you have to juggle multiple demands. It might be helpful to stagger resuming responsibilities and tasks if at all possible.
- Ensure you have regular opportunities for rest and downtime; time to yourself to engage in self-care activities. Be kind and compassionate towards yourself as you would another.
- Remember, it's ok to struggle or feel overwhelmed at times. This is an unprecedented time and we need to help one another to adjust and function. If you need support and help, please reach out.

## **2) Looking after primary aged children**

It is important not to assume how a child will react and cope; some will manage the reintegration and changes without too much difficulty, whereas others may struggle. This may not be immediate or obvious so it is important to acknowledge that for some children it may take weeks or months to readjust to the changes that have already happened and will continue to happen in their daily lives. Children may struggle to understand, express or communicate how they are feeling. You may notice changes in their behaviour or how they play and interact with others which may seem out of character. These changes are more likely to occur following a traumatic or significant change in life and are indicative of a child processing and adjusting to these experiences. With some adaptations and a supportive, consistent and empathic approach, these emotional needs can be met and the behaviour of concern managed and resolved without too much difficulty and without the need for specialist support or input.

### **Things that you can do to help:**

- Regular use of praise, validation, empathy. Respond with reassurance, kindness and compassion.
- Practice in getting themselves back into a routine before school reintegration starts; getting up early in the morning and getting ready for going to school and re-establishing a good bedtime routine so that when school re-starts this is less of an adjustment to make.
- If children do have questions or on-going worries, it is important to acknowledge, validate and discuss these using age appropriate language whilst also being thoughtful about the level of detail shared.
- Communicate with us at school if you are concerned about the emotional impact that this has had on your child. Seek support from the links on CAMHS article, **click here**. There are links to support and advice in the pupil support section of the school website.
- Predictability and consistency are important during times which are unsettling

### 3) Looking after secondary school aged young people

It is important not to assume how a young person will react and cope; some will manage the reintegration and changes without too much difficulty, whereas others may struggle. This may not be immediate or obvious so it is important to acknowledge that for some young people it may take weeks or months to readjust to the changes that have already happened and will continue to happen in their daily lives.

Young people may struggle to understand, express or communicate how they are feeling. You may notice changes in their behaviour or how they interact with others which may seem out of character. Children may experience changes in their sleeping, eating, levels of confidence and independence and some may display signs of struggling emotionally (e.g., being more anxious, withdrawn or clingy, hyperactive or irritable and aggressive). These changes are more likely to occur following a traumatic or significant change in life and are indicative of a young person processing and adjusting to these experiences. With some adaptations and a supportive, consistent and empathic approach, these emotional needs can be met and the behaviour of concern managed and resolved without too much difficulty and without the need for specialist support or input.

Some young people may be anxious about having fallen behind, that they have not done as much work as their peers or as expected or that there will be a lot of work to do when school re-starts in order to 'make up' for the time missed in school.

#### Things that you can do to help:

- If young people do have questions or on-going worries, it is important to acknowledge, validate and discuss these using age appropriate language whilst also being thoughtful about the level of detail shared.
- Communication is essential between parents/ carers and professionals working with or supporting a young person. It will be important to be aware of how the young person has coped during the pandemic and period of social distancing/ isolation particularly if they have experienced direct or indirect illness or bereavement.
- Predictability and consistency are important during times which are unsettling.
- Sharing proposed timetables and expectations of what young people will be doing as well as providing clarity on what emotional support will be in place/ available for those who are struggling.
- Communicate with us at school if you are concerned about the emotional impact that this has had on your child. Seek support from the links on CAMHS article, **click here**. There are links to support and advice in the pupil support section of the school website.
- Young people may benefit from practice in getting themselves back into a routine before school reintegration starts; getting up early in the morning and getting ready for going to school and re-establishing a good bedtime routine so that when school re-starts this is less of an adjustment to make.
- Regular use of praise, validation, empathy, kindness and compassion are invaluable in helping young people feel contained and supported.

### 4) Looking after young people with SEND and Autistic Spectrum Condition

It is important not to assume how a child/ young person will react and cope; some will manage the reintegration and changes without too much difficulty, whereas others may struggle. This may not be immediate or obvious so it is important to acknowledge that for some children it may take weeks or months to readjust to the changes that have already happened and will continue to happen in their daily lives.

Children and young people may struggle to understand, express or communicate how they are feeling. You may notice changes in their behaviour or how they play and interact with others

which may seem out of character. Children and young people may experience changes in their sleeping, eating, levels of confidence and daily functioning and some may display signs of struggling emotionally (e.g., being more anxious, withdrawn or clingy, hyperactive or irritable and aggressive).

It may be helpful to pay particular attention to behaviour (especially if it's new or concerning) in order to better understand the function (purpose) it serves. Typical functions of behaviour include; 1) sensory seeking/ avoidance (this often has a self-soothing effect), 2) escape (avoidance or elimination of something aversive or unwanted, e.g., having to do something the person does not want to do), 3) care eliciting (seeking attention and care from others), 4) social avoidance and 5) tangible gain (attempts to get/ have something e.g., wanting something that has been denied or taken away or wanting something in response to boredom).

If young people do have questions or on-going worries, it is important to acknowledge, validate and discuss these using appropriate language or communication aids (such as social stories) whilst also being thoughtful about the level of detail shared.

Communication is essential between parents/ carers and professionals working with or supporting a young person. It will be important to be aware of how the young person has coped during the pandemic and period of social distancing/ isolation particularly if they have experienced direct or indirect illness or bereavement.

Some young people may be enjoying being at home and having virtual contact with friends and peers, it might be helpful to think whether any of the adjustments made during the pandemic can be continued or integrated to better support the young person.

Some young people may be anxious about school reintegration or find this change in routine unsettling.

#### **Things that you can do to help:**

- Young people may require additional use of communication aids such as communication systems (Widgits, Makaton, PECS), using visual guides with symbols, images and easy read text in order to aid two way communication.
- To understand the function of behaviour, it can be helpful to consider what was happening before the behaviour occurred and what the outcome of the behaviour was. By understanding the purpose of why a young person may be engaging in a particular behaviour will allow you to consider other ways of meeting the young person's need which in turn may reduce the frequency or intensity of the behaviour being displayed.
- Ensure that young people have access to self-soothe aids (materials, activities) at all times. It may be helpful to schedule in dedicated self-soothe time into a young person's day/ week. It is important that caregivers (especially if they are new to the young person) are aware of triggers for anxiety or distress (not limited to adjustments following the pandemic) as well as de-escalation strategies/ techniques and self-soothe materials/ activities.
- It may be helpful to use visual aids and social stories to help young people understand and adjust to new routines and activities.
- Young people may benefit from practice in getting themselves back into a routine before school reintegration starts; getting up early in the morning and getting ready for going to school and re-establishing a good bedtime routine so that when school re-starts this is less of an adjustment to make.
- Predictability and consistency are important during times which are unsettling.
- Regular use of praise, validation, empathy, kindness and compassion are invaluable in helping children feel contained and supported.

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